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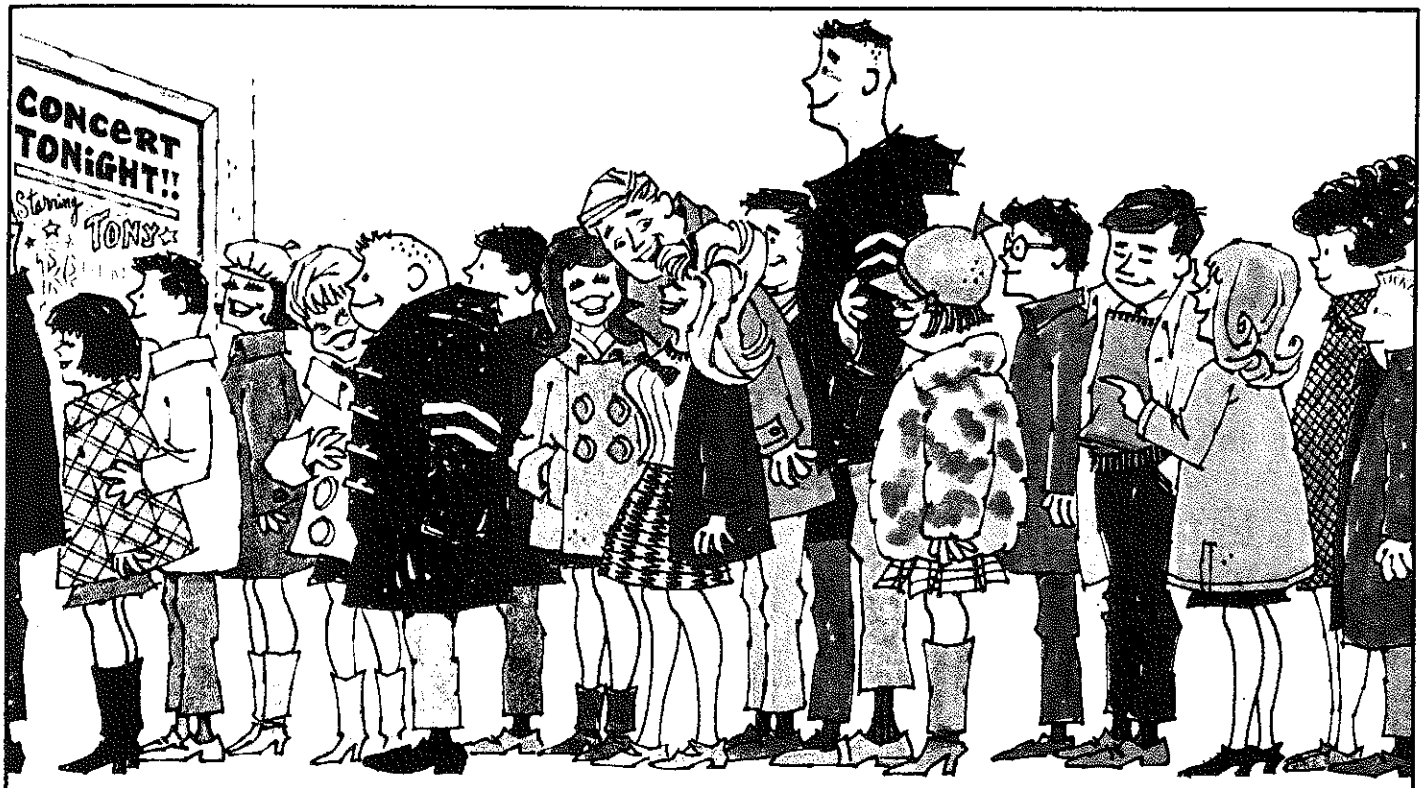


THE COLLEGE MARKET FOR RECORDS AND TALENT

Cramped quarters of WNYU's former headquarters made broadcasting difficult, but . . .

now operations have moved to a new $20,000 broadcast central with several studios and control rooms, record library, office, and engineering shop.

CAMPUS RADIO REPORT

WNYU Programming Theme

'Avoid the Obvious'

By HARRY ZERLER
Director of Special Projects
WYNU, New York University

WNYU, the "student voice of New York University," demonstrates that a college radio station, staffed exclusively with undergraduates, can hold its own in competition with commercial stations in a metropolitan market.

WNYU was founded 17 years ago and began carrier-current operations from home-made facilities in the basement of one of the oldest buildings on the university's uptown campus.

Since that time the station has developed into a major outlet of college radio in the Northeast, serving some 10,000 listeners on both the University Heights and Washington Square campuses of NYU.

Now broadcasting 66 hours of AM carrier-current programming per week from both a brand-new $20,000 broadcast central on the Bronx campus and studios in Washington Square, the station's application for an FM-Stereo broadcast license is, at presstime, awaiting the imminent approval of the FCC.

Through it all, the operation has remained entirely in the hands of NYU students whose previous experience in broadcasting has been nil. Is this a "Cinderella" story?

"Hardly," declares station manager Joseph Steinberg. "The key to our success, like that of all college radio stations, lies in our ability to customize our programming to our listener's interests to a degree which can't be matched by our competition." With virtually all of WNYU's audience located in the New York metropolitan area, the competition for listeners with the dozens of high-powered, financially potent, professional stations in the area would seem to weigh heavily against the collegians. WNYU's program director, Richard Robins, explains how college radio at NYU rises to the challenge:

"The first step toward successful programming is to get to know your audience and to get inside their listening habits. College students are notorious purists and frequently nonconformists with respect to the tastes of the 'general listener' in any given area. In any event, their likes and dislikes are rather well defined. For us at WNYU this means programming highly specialized, 'pure' forms of the various major kinds of music our students listen to, and doing so in formats and at times which are not heard elsewhere."

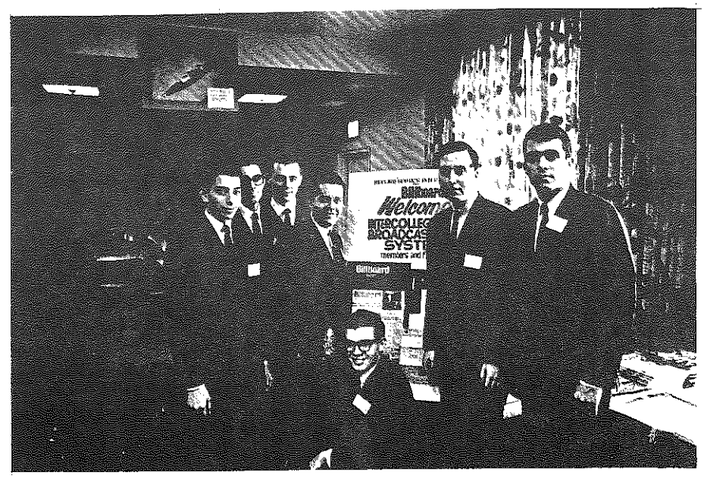
A large part of the WNYU audience, as at most college campuses, is made up of jazz lovers. Accordingly the station programs an hour of jazz each weekday night from 11 to 12, a time-slot in which it is the only AM station in the area offering jazz exclusively. This in itself is not enough to guarantee a good audience. WNYU develops devoted listeners by exploiting the college's student's streak of purism: each night it offers jazz in a particular vein. One evening it presents "Inside Sounds," an hour of "straight ahead" jazz performed by popular combos and big bands; the next evening it's "Folk to Jazz," a program exploring the folk roots in early jazz. The next night it offers "Reeds and Deeds" during which aficionados of the saxophone hear their favorite performers and many of the newer, farther-out pieces, and so on.

WNYU combines these elements of timing and content with authoritative commentary from air personalities who share their listeners' particular prejudices, and provides further insights in frequent personal interviews with the large number of artists available in New York. The listener response to this programming policy has been tremendous.

How do these tactics hold up in the more traditional areas of radio programing in which there are fewer "pure" strains and a greater broadcast availability of the type of music involved? David Stein, director of classical music for WNYU, has the answer:

"Our classical music programming policy can be summarized as an attempt to avoid the obvious. We have a flat prohibition against programming 'pop classics' or 'light classics,' as well as those very well known (and deservedly popular) masterpieces that are frequently aired especially by those stations whose programming is predominantly non-classical. Behind the popular 'standards' of classical music (represented by such works as the Brandenburg Concertos, the symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms, the best known operas of Verdi, etc.) there is a wide range of 'obscure' music, the 'merely' good music that is unduly neglected because it is overshadowed. WNYU seeks to explore the vast amount of good and great music within that range, from Beethoven's chamber music to the works of Karol Szymanowski. By offering music which is not generally available elsewhere, we are able to attract an audience away from the established classical music stations."

Surprisingly enough, the same general policy which Stein uses for classical programming produces good results in the nearly opposite area of pop vocal and instrumental programming. Each evening on "Artist's Showcase" WNYU DJ's air the top hits of one particular artist or orchestra for the entire program. In this case it is not the obscurity of the material aired, but the specificity of it which pays off in listenership. Once



AT IBS's 26th ANNUAL CONVENTION: running the show were (l. to r.) Harry Zerler, Michael Marcovsky, of WNYU; Tom McCloud of IBS; Billboard's own Don Ovens; Richard Robins, Lee Rudnick, and Joseph Steinberg, of WNYU.

An NYU co-ed is busy at the Campus Store, seeking hits she's heard on Campus Radio.

Columbia Records recording artist Earl "Fatha" Hines discusses his music with Bruce Opitz, host of WNYU's "Folk to Jazz" program.

(Continued from page 41)

again, programming for specific tastes in not generally available formats spells radio success.

Station Manager Steinberg notes that it would be difficult for this programming policy to succeed were it not for the fact that all of WNYU's staff are college students who enjoy music themselves:

"Although our people come to us without any real knowledge of broadcasting, they have a vital knowledge of the sort of music which they and other college students are keen on. They are highly sensitive to new movements going on in the industry and to new trends developing among listeners. The degree of professionalism which is rapidly developed by virtue of this personal insight is most gratifying."

The story of WNYU is not unique by any means: the station is one of more than 250 carrier-current AM and FM college stations across the nation associated in the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System. The rising prominence of college radio was readily apparent during IBS's 26th annual convention, hosted by WNYU last spring and to be held at Rutgers University this year, as some 200 delegates attended workshops led by distinguished leaders of the broadcasting and music industries and viewed exhibits from all the major broadcast equipment firms and record companies.

Increasing co-operation with and recognition of college radio on the part of top record company executives, distributors and artist's representatives is the order of the day.

Everyone who exhibited at the convention became suddenly aware of the true marketing value of college radio. Record promoters and distributors who formerly gave little or no service to college stations because they felt they had little impact upon the market had second thoughts when they saw the volume of record sales going on in the NYU Campus Stores in conjunction with sponsorship of many programs on WNYU. Similarly, artist's personal representatives are beginning to realize that campus radio exposure can make the difference between playing to a half-full house or to a sellout audience.

As the long standing friendships between college radio and men like Paul Brown, Frank Campana and Sol Handwerger show greater and greater mutual dividends, more and more of the tough guys in the business have begun to play ball with college radio and wound up batting a thousand.